

Have A Little Faith

Romans 10:8-15, Matthew 14:31

A few years ago, I got a new hip – as most of you know. I wasn't nervous at all when I went in for surgery because I had talked to several friends from high school who had just had the same surgery. They talked about a changed life, how grateful they were to have had the surgery, about the new person they became.

I had faith that everything was going to go well. I had faith in my doctor and his staff. I had faith that after physical therapy I would feel like a new person, too. And more than that, I had faith that God would protect me. I had a little faith, but it's not always easy for us.

The Bible is filled with things that have happened in God's timeline that require faith to believe, but are the basis of this thing called Christianity, this thing that we claim as our own, this thing that we wear like skin, this thing that is who we have become.

They are big things, and are sometimes hard to understand and sometimes we doubt, and sometimes we blindly believe – and then there's the in between, too.

Jesus, born of God, healed the sick, taught us to love and then, in the ultimate example of love, died on the cross for our sins ... so many sins that had not even been committed yet, but He took them to the cross!

And then – the biggest step of faith, we are called to believe that on the third day, Jesus rose from the dead and walked amongst His friends. These men and women who clung to His words, but struggled with their belief, were given back this great Gift that was received by everyone on that first Christmas Day.

And then Jesus left them again. But, in His absence, the Holy Spirit came to be God's presence with us always. And here's one of those parts of Christianity that can be mind boggling ... God, the Father; Jesus, the Son; the Holy Spirit, God's presence – these Three make up our one God!

By faith – we believe these things.

Scripture says so much about faith. Here's a few:

Matthew 17:20 – *If you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.*

What little faith we must have that we can't even imagine talking to a mountain and asking it to move just a few inches.

Matthew 21:22 – *Whatever you ask for in prayer with faith, you will receive.*

But, wait! I prayed that my dad's cancer would disappear ... and it didn't. I had faith. Where was God? What I actually prayed for, though, was that my dad would be healed. And he was. The healing was in God calling him home.

Hebrews 11:6 – *And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach Him, must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him.*

That one amazes me that it had to be said. Why would someone approach God without faith that God exists? Can you imagine praying to someone or something that you didn't believe in and actually expecting any good from your prayers? God knows what we believe, in what we place our faith. How could someone who didn't believe in our Father please Him?

And then, God's promise to us!! Ephesians 2:8-9 – *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not the result of works, so that no one may boast.*

I love this one. My early understanding of salvation was pretty sad. I was led to believe that no matter how hard I tried, I wouldn't know if I had done well enough to receive a place in Heaven until after I died ... and maybe I would need to stay for quite some time in a non-descript netherworld until my family's prayers for me did some extra work.

But now! I know that I am saved through my faith in God, my faith in the Holy Spirit, my faith in Jesus Christ who died for my sins when it should have been my punishment, not His. There is nothing I can do other than to believe in Him and ask for forgiveness to know that one day I will be the Father.

In today's passage from Matthew, Jesus is still trying to get away by Himself to spend time with His Father. It seems like we find Him doing that a lot. Looking for a quiet place to pray, to talk to His Father. If we are to be more like Jesus, we, too, should be finding time to be with our Father alone and quiet, listening for His voice, sharing our day, praising His Name, asking for His guidance and presence!

So, today Jesus sends the disciples out in a boat that becomes battered by the waves. He walks on the water, toward the boat and the men are afraid that it's a ghost. Jesus tells them not to be afraid. Peter says, *"If it's really you, Jesus, command me to come to you onto the water!"* So, Jesus tells Peter to come forward.

Peter climbs out of the boat and begins walking on the water, but then he remembers the waves ... that humans aren't meant to be walking on top of the water, that humans sink! and, panicking, that's what Peter does, he starts to sink. He calls out to Jesus to save him. Jesus reaches out His hand to Peter and says, *"You of little faith, why did you doubt?"*

Jesus walks on the water, Peter tells Jesus to call him, too, onto the water; and then, when Jesus allows Peter to walk on the water – his faith crumbles and he sinks.

Do we have enough faith in Jesus that we believe that He is able to do those things we ask for that are in-line with God's ways? Or do we pull back our faith and sink when the storm rages around us, thinking it's up to ourselves?

A few years ago I quoted from the movie "Amish Grace." "Faith, when everything is as you want it to be, is not true faith. It is only when our lives are falling apart that we have the chance to make our faith real."

In other words, faith isn't believing in God because everything is wonderful. Faith is believing that God is still present through the storms of our lives.

It is praising God in the darkness, knowing He is present when we don't know where our next meal is coming from, knowing God is present when we are watching our loved ones suffer, knowing God is with us when family or friends seemingly turn their backs on us, knowing God is leading us when we don't know the direction we should travel, knowing God will never abandon us even when the world is turned upside down, knowing that maybe things will turn out as we desire or maybe not.

Romans 10: 8 and 9 say: *"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim), because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*

Paul was telling Israel that they shouldn't be looking for the Messiah to suddenly appear, because the Messiah had already come through Jesus Christ. They don't have to wait – they can believe right now, they can know their Savior, they can have faith that they will never be abandoned.

The same goes for today. The people of this world can believe in their hearts that Jesus is the Messiah and be saved! We can have faith that we are never alone.

Verses 10-13 says: *For one believes with the heart, leading to righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, leading to salvation. The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

Again ... *"everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."*

This is the Good News of the Gospel!

Yes – how we live our lives should show a person our faith, should show that we are a changed people. But ... we cannot expect someone who doesn't know Jesus, who has maybe never been told of Jesus, to look at us and say, "Well, they seem to be nice people ... I bet Jesus died on the cross for my sins!"

They can't get from step one to step ... I don't know, step five ... without knowing the inbetween.

They aren't going to figure that out just by looking at our lives! Their curiosity might be aroused; they may wonder about what we have that's missing in their life ... but the faith we have isn't coming to them just by looking at us if they don't even know who we have put our faith in.

Verses 14 and 15: *But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"*

When our faith is strong enough to remind us that although we endure suffering, we are never alone; when our faith is strong enough so that we know that the hardships we face have no power over us – then we can praise God, we can speak of God, we can glorify God... it is then that we can listen to where God is leading us, how God is calling us to speak, to serve, to love, to renew ourselves, trusting that God is ever-present.

We can pray that opportunities appear, doors are opened so we can the path ahead. We can pray that God opens the hearts of those around us, so they are ready to hear God's Word. We can pray to God to open our mouths, give us the words so that we can fearlessly share the Gospel and point them toward Jesus! Faith comes by hearing our personal stories, hearing the eternal lifesaving truth of the Gospel!

We can pray that we have the little bit of faith required to be a part of a huge change. We can invite others to know, to have faith in this wonderful, faithful, merciful and good God that loves us and them, too!

It's been a little bit since I've had what some would call an Altar Call. And I'm not going to call you up to the altar, physically. But I am going to ask you to pray with me – it's going to be a long prayer. Maybe you have been a little distant from God and you need to get closer to Him. Maybe you realize the need to slow down and feel God's presence. Maybe you've been searching for God and you've never found Him ... until yesterday or today or this very moment. Maybe you continue to search, but know there's something out there for you.

I'm going invite anyone who has questions, anyone who wants to officially join our church family, anyone who wants to proclaim that they truly know Jesus as their Savior for the first time ... to come up and speak to me after church or even at our picnic this afternoon.

As we pray, you'll know the words that you want to stress to God most.
Silently pray with me now:

Dear Jesus, I know I am a sinner and I need You in my life. I believe You died on the cross for my sins and rose again from the dead. Please forgive me for all the wrong things I have done, the things that took you to that cross for me. I invite You into my heart to be my Lord and Savior. Help me to live for You and follow Your ways. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit and give me strength to turn away from sin.

Thank You for loving me and accepting me just as I am. I trust in You alone for my salvation and eternal life. Help me to grow in faith and share Your love with others.

Heavenly Father, I come back to You with a humble heart. I feel like I've wandered away from Your love and forgotten how much You mean to me. Please forgive me for the times I have ignored You or I chose my own way instead of Yours.

I remember the day I first accepted Jesus as my Savior, and I want to feel that closeness again. Renew my faith and help me trust in Your promises. Wash away my doubts and fears with Your perfect love.

Fill my heart with joy and peace once more.

Lord, help me to read Your Word, pray every day, and live in a way that honors You. Thank You for never letting go of me, even before I knew You, even after I knew You as Lord, but I let go of You.

As we pray together, we think also of our loved ones who don't yet know You as Savior and we ask for You to open their eyes to see their need. Remove any hardness, pride or hurt that keeps them from accepting Your love. Send someone into their lives to share the Gospel with love and kindness.

We have faith in all that You can do.

In Jesus most perfect Name we pray, Amen.

What's especially exciting, is if you've never prayed that prayer, you are now a member of God's family and are promised a place in Heaven!